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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5//

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU//TCH//

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RUEUITH/TLO ANKARA TU

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001875

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: RULING AKP SCORES SOLID VICTORY IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

REF: ANKARA 1859 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (U) Summary. Unofficial results indicate that Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) scored a significant victory in July 22 parliamentary elections, returning to power with 46.6% of the vote, up from 34% in the 2002 election. Two other parties crossed the ten percent election threshold, along with 27 independent candidates, creating a fractious if more representative congress. Opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) pulled in 20.8% of the vote, a slight increase over its 2002 share of 19%. National Movement Party (MHP), which failed to cross the ten percent election threshold in 2002, captured 14.4% of the vote. AKP appears set to form another single-party government, with around 340 of parliament's 550 seats, but returns with a reduced majority and short of the 367 seats needed to elect the next president or amend Turkey's military-drafted constitution. CHP is expected to secure approximately 112 seats and MHP around 71 seats. Commentators view the results as the opposition's failure as much as AKP's success.

¶2. (U) Summary cont'd. Turkey's Supreme Election Board (SEB) Chairman stated the elections were generally free of irregularities, with official results expected within a week, barring major challenges. The new parliament will convene five days after final results are announced; election of a Speaker, formation of a new government and election of Turkey's next president will top the agenda. End Summary.

¶3. (U) Turnout was high (84%) as Turks interrupted their summer holidays to return to vote in their neighborhoods in what many regard as a pivotal general election (reflets). AKP increased its share of the vote from 34% in the 2002 elections to 46.6%, the first time in 50 years voters have returned a governing party with an improved showing. CHP, with 20.8% of the vote, lost seats to AKP and MHP in several of its strongholds, such as Izmir, Antalya, Mersin and Adana. MHP's nationalist campaign attracted 14.4%, reportedly an 85% increase over 2002 results. Independent candidates, including former (Motherland/ANAP) Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz, Grand Unity Party (BBP) Chairman Muhsin Yazicioglu, Freedom and Solidarity Party (ODP) Chairman Ufuk Uras and at least 23 linked to the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), will enter parliament with AKP, CHP and MHP deputies.

Democrat Party Loses Its Head

¶4. (SBU) Democrat Party (DP) leader Mehmet Agar resigned as

chairman early in the evening, after DP stalled at under 6% of the vote. DP Vice Chair (and former ambassador to the US) Nuzhet Kandemir also resigned. The party, initially billed as a merger of the True Path Party (DYP) and the Motherland Party (Anavatan), held promise as a center-right alternative to AKP but stumbled badly when the merger collapsed. Agar's resignation opens the field for a leadership race, and solidifies AKP's claim as the center-right's representative.

A Whole New Ball-Game

¶5. (U) The hotly-contested election produced some notable changes from the 2002 general election. Noting that Turkey's leftist parties, including CHP, won only one-fifth of votes nationwide, commentators stated AKP had overtaken CHP - the party founded by Kemal Ataturk - as the party that represents Turkey. AKP improved its performance in Turkey's larger cities, including CHP-stronghold Izmir where AKP increased its share of the vote from 17% in 2002 to 30% in 2007. AKP and CHP are projected to hold ten Izmir seats each, with four seats captured by MHP. AKP reportedly more than doubled its votes in Turkey's southeast region. DTP-affiliated independents pulled in 47.5% of votes in Diyarbakir, with AKP a close second with 41.9%. Overall, DTP votes dropped from 6% in 2002 (as DEHAP) to 4% in 2007, with many of those votes moving to AKP. Nationalist MHP succeeded in luring more votes from CHP than from AKP to sail over the ten percent threshold.

Next Steps

¶6. (U) The new parliament will convene five days after the Supreme Election Board announces official results, expected by July 29. MPs will take their oath and begin the process

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of electing a Speaker and Bureau of Assembly, which must be completed within 10 days of convening. The eldest deputy, CHP's Sukru Elekdag will serve as temporary Speaker in the interim. President Sezer is expected to appoint a prime minister soon after parliament convenes, possibly by August 3 or 6; past practice has been to pass the mandate to the leader of the strongest party. A new government must be formed and approved within 45 days or the parliament may be dissolved, forcing another round of elections. Once parliamentary bodies are organized and a new government is in place, deputies' top issue will be the controversial process of electing Turkey's next president, however, there is no prescribed start date for the 30-day process. MHP and independent MPs may hold the key to AKP assembling the 367 deputies needed for a quorum and to elect a president in initial voting, suggesting that the new government will still need to seek compromise despite its solid election victory.

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